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More Than Pigs and Corn

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Of The Herald Tribune Staff

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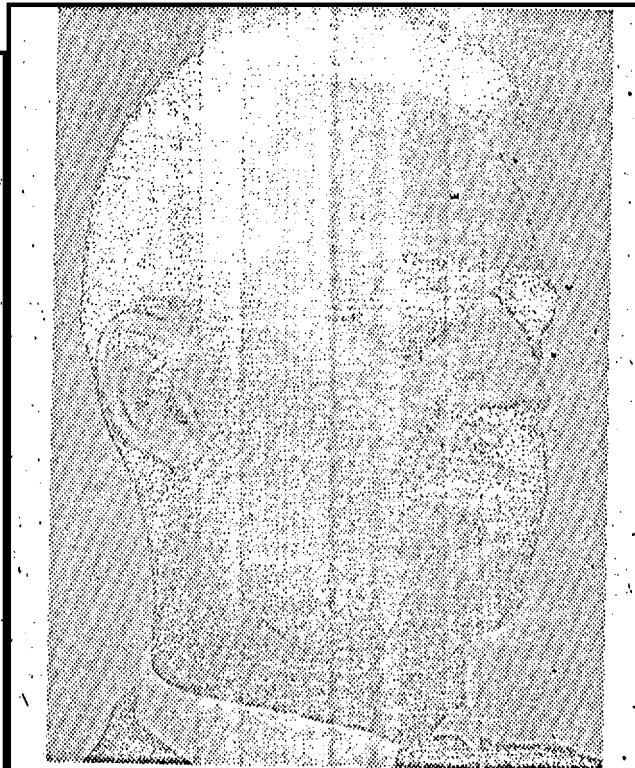
In March, 1963, with modest fanfare and sincere high hopes, the United States launched a \$2 million corn-pig program in South Viet Nam.

Three pigs were given to each of 5,000 Vietnamese families through the South Vietnamese government. Along with the pigs, each family received a year's supply of corn for the animals, plus enough cement and other construction materials to build small sties for them.

The objects of the program were simple: To provide a source of food, or revenue, for the families; to give South Viet Nam a strain of sound, healthy pigs which would reproduce more pigs for distribution to other families; to give the families a slightly larger stake, in the hope that the gifts of the pigs would generate some gratitude and thereby, perhaps, a little more loyalty to and faith in their government.

In a country at peace, a less-fragmented nation of people with some sense of unity, the program might have worked, might have attained its goal of three pigs each in 100,000 families by 1967.

But South Viet Nam is a country with little sense of cohesion, at war. And those factors—which have crippled or modified or jiggled askew so many other American-sponsored civilian (as distinguished from military) programs in Viet Nam—unhinged the corn-pig project.



Maj. Gen. Edward T. Lansdale

DIRECT USE

Instead of raising the pigs and building sties for them, some families—with that peasant directness which dictates attention first to self—butchered the animals, cooked and ate the corn and used the building materials to repair their houses.

Others built sties and stuffed corn into the pigs until they were of cooking-pot dimensions. Then, fearing that a skulking band of Communist guerrillas or a government militia patrol might happen by, the families ate or sold the pigs.

On the surface, the corn-pig program seemed a bust.

But in a curious way, unforeseen by its planners, the program achieved a result which delighted some of them: some of the families expressing gratitude to the government, raised their pigs, and when the animals were large enough for butchering, or when they had litters of piglets for distribution to others, the families banded together into loose co-operatives to sell or give them away on the basis of a common, voted decision.

"We lost money on the pigs and corn," one American official acknowledged ruefully last week, "but we made a little money, on a little to be

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